

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**MOGAN CULTURAL CENTER
LOWELL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK
UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
KHMER ORAL HISTORY PROJECT I**

**INFORMANT: JUNE TAING [CAMBODIA]
INTERVIEWER: MEHMED ALI
DATE: AUGUST 19, 2003**

**J = JUNE
A = ALI**

**Tape 03.14
Side A**

J: [Phons] was in New York, New Jersey, I mean Johnstown, New York. (A: Yah) He stayed there almost a year. (A: Yah) And then my oldest sister had a brother-in-law lived in Lowell. So they kind of communicated back on the phone, and then we decided to move to Lowell in 1981.

A: Okay.

J: Yah. I was living in Lowell since then until 1986. After I had three children we moved to live in Pelham, New Hampshire.

A: Great.

?: I'm questioning, how do you spell it?

J: My name. My name. Then I became a citizen. I changed my name to June Taing, J U N E, T A I N G. My original name was Houg, H O U N G.

?: And same last name?

J: Same last name, umhm.

?: And when and where were you born?

J: I was born in Battambang, Cambodia.

?: And how long did you live there?

J: I was born in 1960. I lived there for almost nineteen years. (?: Wow) So during the Pohl Pot I was about fifteen years old. So I went through all these drama of the experience that other people had been through. So I, now when I remember what happen, but I kind of reflect that as my experience and looking forward to the future. That's how I'm able to cope my life.

?: And did you go to school when you were young?

J: I went to school for about, let me see, seven, seven years. During that time the first grade was, they called twelve grade. They start from twelve to one. So I went from twelve to seventh grade. So I had like about seven years in school, middle school. But then I kept you know, since then, then I came to America. First time I started to read Bible in Khmer. That's how I was able to bring back my word of reading Khmer [unclear] through translation right now [I'm helping] with that in Khmer.

?: How big was your family back in Cambodia?

J: My mother had ten children. Two of them would die. One was, died before Pohl Pot, and my, that was my youngest sister. And my older brother, the second oldest brother, was killed at the same time with my father in 1979, right after the Vietnamese invasion in Cambodia. They were killed by, stepped by the landmine. When they, when we came back to Battambang, and then my father, my older brother, and my uncle road the cow cart to pick up stuff. I think it was to pick up jewelry, some of the valuable rice, and then some food that they hide in the ground. When my father dig that, the place that he was suppose to find his valuable stuff, he couldn't find anything. Either the Vietnamese soldier, or the Cambodian soldier put the landmine around there. And then when he went in, he stepped by the landmine and then they, both my father and my brother got killed at the same time. But they didn't die right away. My father was there and my brother was able to crawl back to the cart. My uncle was waiting on the cart, the cow cart. And then my father was there in the little house there. And then he crawled back to his old bed. He died [unclear]. No one in my family was able to, went to help him to you know, to do the funeral over there. So he was like you know, laying there and died just like an animal. And my brother, when my uncle took him back to Battambang, on the way back it was very hot in the afternoon, and then he was pass away on the cart, because of the blood coming out so much.

?: And how did you younger sister die?

J: My younger sister, she had some kind of liver disease, and before Pohl Pot. It was in 1974. So that was another, they are different stories.

?: And what were your parents occupation? Were you guys farmers?

J: They were butcher and farmer.

?: How was your living condition like (--)

J: Before Pohl Pot?

?: Yes, during that time before, when you were young.

J: I consider my parents were like a middle class family. They were able to manage to support the family. They really enjoy you know, the way they brought up. They got along with their community. They had a lot of friends. They, they just, I say it was fine because we didn't starve before then.

?: And what are your parents' names?

J: My father name was Yiv [June].

?: Spell that please?

J: Y I V, last name, Y I V. My mom's name is Khoy Chao. K H O Y, last name C H A O. My mom still here.

?: [Unclear] Where, and where, where were they born?

J: My parents?

?: Yes.

J: They were born in Cambodia, but my father's father, he was born from China. So they escaped from China to Cambodia. That was during the [Unclear], the communist in China. So they fled China to Cambodia.

A: What year would that be? (J: Um?) Before World War II?

J: I don't know about it.

A: You parents were both born in Cambodia?

J: My, my mother was born in Cambodia. My father was a baby they brought from China.

?: And where were your father's father, and father's mother born?

J: In China.

?: And did they come to Cambodia. Did they come to Cambodia also with your father, or?

J: Yah. When they had my father and his older brother, they came to Cambodia, because they tried to escape from the communist country. My grandfather was a teacher in China. He was really educated. And the time I was brought up, grow up to see him, he was blind because I think either he might have glaucoma or cataract. It's not, it wasn't blind from a baby, or when he was born. So we think it's, I just think that they didn't know he had it.

?: So you remember them vividly kind of?

J: My grandparents?

?: Your grandparents.

J: Yah, we live with them. They live in my parent's home. I knew them very well. And when they, when I was young, my grandmother every morning get up early, make rice, make pot of rice soup. Then she would invite all of her grandchildren, not just my family, my other and uncle and aunt that lives around there come to have breakfast together, and they bless it. When I grow up I never seen my grandfather see stuff, see stuff, see anything. But I heard that my mom said he was blind, one time that all of a sudden he was blind. Somehow they thought he allergic to food. But to me since I learn a lot, taking a lot of training in here, I think he was, either had cataract, or glaucoma. So he wasn't natural blind from birth.

?: So what would you do normally for fun when you were a child?

J: I would play with my neighbor children. We would play doll, but we'd use a little rock, wrap it with banana leave, and then we pretend that is a little doll. And we play mother and brother, sister of [stick]. We play with this stick, just all kind pretending things because we don't have real toys like in here. Some game we play, different game, one of the game that I remember we use chopstick. Just roll it on the table, or on the floor, and then we used lemon to, to catch the lemon and then at the same time catch the chopstick. That is, was the girl game. And then we played, what do you call? In here they have it too. Let me show you what. In Cambodia we use rock. In here we use marbles.

?: It's okay.

J: Yah, the game that I have like twelve or ten holes, and then you put the marble around the hole.

A: Like Chinese Checkers?

J: Right, right, but different. They way that we played, we used the rock because we didn't have anything to [unclear].

A: What was the name of the game with the chopsticks and the lemon?

J: [Unclear] something, yah, something like that. I still, once in a while I try to let my children know by playing that this is one of my, the game that I used to play in Cambodia. And then sometime we do, we make, like you throw on the sidewalk and then you use one feet just hopping around.

A: Like hopscotch?

J: Right, hopscotch. Those are some of the games in Cambodian that we played.

?: So what was your first employment? Where did you work at your first job?

J: My first job. When I was in New York I worked during the school year, while I was in school I took a couple of hours from after school to help cleaning to school, more like after school program thing.

?: Did everybody do that?

J: Not everybody, because my family were refugees, was the only refugee in Johnstown, New York, and I told them that I didn't have enough money to support my parents, my brother and sister. So they gave me work to clean, cleaning, folding the laundry, and then mopping the floor in school. That was my first job. After that, during the summer I joined a label company, just label the garment for different [unclear]. And when I came to, to Lowell, my first job was helping handicapped person for a couple of hours a day. That was my earning. Then I got a job at Building 19 ½, folding the clothes. During that time I got paid like 3 ½, \$3.50 an hour. I didn't know how to drive. My husband took me to work. A week and I make \$130.00 or something like that. I was very happy, because I never had a real job before, and I thought, you know, that was cool to be able to earn some money.

?: How old were you then?

J: About twenty-two years old. And I didn't know how to drive. I came here in Lowell, we was on Welfare. My son was on welfare for about 18 months, but during that 18 months I kind of help the other people at the same time. So I didn't expect myself to live under any assistance now, because I feel that I came here, they give me a lot of support, a lot of freedom, and I need to, to (--) Somehow I don't see that's it's part of my life. I want to get a real job. I want to give it back to the community. That's why at the same time I got to church, and I help other people, even though during that time my English wasn't really good, I still helping people by taking them to hospital, or translate, helping interpreting for them during, whenever they need me. That is one of the wish that I always wanted to do that. That's why I take this job right now, because I feel like the

community has given me so much, especially having been in Elliot Presbyterian Church for over 20 years. I remember the first time I came to Lowell, went to church. I didn't have any clothes, or furniture. They brought me old furniture, old clothes. And I was so grateful for them. And food, and they were so friendly to, to support us. So I kind of took that as a lesson, not to giving back to them, but to giving back to people who less fortunate than me. So they can pass it along to other people. And that is some of the things that I'm doing for Casey Family Services. One of our mission is to help family get better, and that also is what I want to be. So I'm very pleased with the work that I do for my agency, also something that I feel like this is something that I always want to do, to help them, the poor people get better. To help themselves connected to other people. To help themselves seeing me as a role model, even though we all make mistake, but some of the good things I hope that they can use that as an example to pass to other people in the community.

?: How old were you during the Vietnamese invasion?

J: I was nineteen years old.

?: So you knew what was going on?

J: Yah, I knew what was going on. I went through the concentration field. I went through starvation. Yah, my, during that time in 1975, maybe 1976, they sent all the single, whether you are teenager, or young teenager, they sent me to different concentration camp. So they put like boys with boys, all the girls with the girls. And I was very sad that they, they wouldn't put me with my other two older sisters. My oldest sister usually they go, they got someplace together, but I ended up went by myself with a bunch of other people that I didn't know them very well, even though we speak the same language. But then when you were in concentration camp you feel like you don't have any friend. You cannot trust anybody, because the Pohl Pot already brainwash you. You cannot say anything bad, or you cannot share anything with other people if they knew, they heard from someone who got killed. So that's what was one of the most dramatized that I've been through. Sometime I feel like during some night that I was sleeping by myself, I was crying almost every night, because I didn't know what was going on, and you can't really understand that you're sleeping in the jungle and then all the mosquito biting you at night. Some night it was raining, cold. And you feel that you miss home and don't know where to go. You don't know who to talk to. You cannot, no, there was no phone, not enough food to eat. And then I got very, very sick from the, I think I had some kind of illness that makes, have fever that made you cold and then very hot.

A: Malaria?

J: Yah, malaria. Right. Right. I had quite a few time of that. At some point I felt like I couldn't survive because I was so weak. I couldn't walk straight. And you did not have enough food, and when you get over it, the malaria, you did not feel like you want to eat. Your body was exhausted from that, from the malaria.

A: Now what are your memories of the Khmer Rouge before they actually took power? Did you have any knowledge about them?

J: I was kind of expect to think that Cambodian tend to most peaceful country. Just what other people thought about it feel like they think like, no more war. When the [Khmer] took place we were suppose to have school, we got everything back. It's suppose to be a normal, normal country just like other country. Live happily, but we didn't, just that, that's what everybody felt about it. After the [Khmer] took place, like a week later they, all of a sudden they send us to the countryside, to the rice field. They make you leave all of your stuff, whatever you have in your house, just go with a load of [unclear], with just small bag of clothes and food to take with you to the farm or the field. That was a big surprise. And people dramatizing that, because of we didn't think thoroughly what's going to happen to us.

A: And where were you living when they took control, in Battambang?

J: We were in [Chithea], which was about ten kilo from Battambang.

A: Okay.

J: I forgot. That was the, my birthplace was [Chithea]. So they sent, they made us go to the farm like about five miles from there to [Chao Kmao]. From Chithea to Chao Kmao, which were like another part, not where we were, to where we were born.

A: And what happened after that?

J: We stayed there and everybody make their own little, build their own little house made from bamboo and then you know, put the, using the grass to make the roof. So anybody can have this, you know, do as they, what they told us to do. And we were living there for about, until the Khmer took, the Vietnamese invaded from there. But at the same time I was there I was really, really sick of malaria. And one point I was unconscious. My parents thought, they, I know some point I was in coma for like a day. And they did all kind of stuff to help me. And what I heard is like during my coma that they didn't have medicine, so they listened to some of the neighbor to use like dry, dry poop on the [grass. Like then they, they part it and they make poop with hot bottle. Make me drink that, all kind of dirty stuff.

A: They, they, what did they make you? What did they use, poop?

J: Yah, on the grass.

A: From, from animals?

J: From people, like humans. That's what I had. So it was so disgusting to know that, because that, I don't know because somehow I felt like when people do not have, like they have no choice, just listen to their friend or whatever, to make me feel better, to cure

my illness. So at some point when I woke up I kind of like you know, knowing that and I was so depressed that I didn't know that I was depressed. For my life I didn't know I was depressed. I learned that when I had my daughter, my little daughter. Now she is nine. Now I kind of look back to my life, I was depressed since I was thirteen years old, that I didn't know that I was depressed. All these experiences, because I don't know about other families. My family, we, we do not, it's a lot in the family. We do not like to talk about other people. You kind of share. You don't share with anybody. Even our parents, we don't share like how we feel about ourself with brother or sister, because you don't feel like, either not feel comfortable, or that it was running in the family. Somehow we brought up like that. And I remember like even my mother, she never say anything how you know, she feel about my father. When I heard them once in a while they had an argument. They kind of let it go. And I don't think, I never hear my brother or sister share like, talk about like my children or me, or me now telling my kids how I feel when I'm upset. I would say that to [them straight]. Or I'm happy about them, I would say that to them straight. So this is, this is, somehow it's very, very hard for a lot of Southeast Asian people to accept that. And since I have been working for Casey, I've been going to a lot of training. And part of my work is to help people see that. So I'm very pleased with what I have learned, and I kind of use that tool not only to help other people, to help myself, to help my family change some of the cultural of whatever, either my family, or other people living through. I don't know about you two, but I mean a lot of family that I heard when they come here to see me, they tell me this and that. I'm not saying bad. It's just like some of the things I've been through with them. I was with them. I understand how they feel, but they don't know how to express their feeling, not even with their own husband or their children. So this is one of the things that I would like to see the young generation, the next generation able to help themselves, and help their parents to get through, to have a more open communication, not just for the family, but their friends, you know, whoever they're engaged to. It's very helpful since I've been through this. Some of the things we [unclear] that it just help me get away, able to see clearly between the, what you're not saying, what you (--) You say it out and make you feel proud of yourself. Just feel relief.

?: And when did you first see that you depressed during that time?

J: Like I said, when I was about thirteen years old that was like, just like a rumor in the country, the country is going to have war, because we were living in the country. Some point in the night there were some like gun, you heard the guns. A lot of Pohl Pot, we call Khmer [unclear], some time they went to the different [building] to ask for money, medical supply, and they told us that they're going to take over the country. And we were, my parents were supporting them, giving them money, giving them medical, whatever they need, and these are all the stuff that adult in Cambodia did not share with the children. And I overheard, I didn't know what was going on. I didn't know what to ask my parent. I kind of like kept that as something that I should [be aware of]. During the night time, instead of wearing a nightgown, or pajamas, I used to wear two sets of clothes just to prepare myself in case you know, you have to run, you run with at least a couple of sets of clothes. And I couldn't sleep because I, I didn't know. I just thought like that was a normal for me to sing, to prepare myself more to be, feel like I was mature

enough. But I didn't know that was part of something that I should open you know, to share with my mother. Even if I share during that time, they probably didn't think that I was the [practical]. No one [knew] the [breath] is something that we take serious in Cambodia.

?: You said that your parents supported the Khmer Rouge. Did they support them because they won, because they agreed with what they were doing, or because they had to.

J: They had to. When they know who you are in the community in the village, they came in during the daytime and talked to you and other people, you know, do the same, did the same thing like them. So they had to, or they were afraid they might get killed.

A: Was your father active in politics, or your grandfather?

J: No one in my family were politicians, because we are business family. What we did was [unclear] communists or any political parties. We just want to have [peace], because we are, my parents, my grandparents were also refugee, came from another country. The same thing like my family right now, I'm not in any political group. What I do to advocate the community. What I have learned, what I see is the best for myself. Somehow I fell like I support in religion more than politics, because I've been going to church for over twenty years. Being a Christian, I also respect Buddhists. I really want to see both religion to understand and respect one another, whether you believe in Buddhism and Christianity. We are human. What we believe is different, and we all believe the same God. It's just different religion, worship different way, have different [truth], and we shouldn't criticize one another. We should accept who we are. We should work as a team, as a community to, to help the next generation see as adults that able to get along together.

A: We wanted to ask you just for background purpose, the names of your grandparents on both sides?

J: My grandmother was (--)

A: This is on your mother's side?

J: My father's side. Moo, [Moojip]. I don't, I don't really know exactly her maiden name. My grandfather was [Choy Yip]. When I was a born I never seen my grandmother, parents before. And she told me, my Mom told me that my, when she born about three months old her parents passed away. (A: Oh) So she didn't quite know her parents either. And she was brought up through older, older sibling.

A: Okay. Do you know why your grandparents passed away?

J: Um, [disease] that they, my mom couldn't really talk about that. Somehow I don't think that she think, she say it's important, but I don't think they realize that it's

something that they need to pass to their children or grandchildren. Because now I kind of like having know so much in this country, I kind of do the best, whatever I've been through I want to let my children know. I write it down in the paper. I put in you know, the computer, so that way they don't think that it's important for them, or they don't think you know. Maybe they say it's boring, but I feel that when they get older, say my age, they probably think this is a piece of history for them to look into.

A: So what happened after the Vietnamese invaded?

J: After the Vietnamese invaded, my father, my father and my older brother passed away. My old, three of my older sisters, they had their own families, so they all lived separately from my mom. And I was like the older sister during that time. We had two younger sister and two younger brother, and my mom together, live together next to my oldest sister, sometimes with them. And my, my brother-in-law, the oldest one, was in charge of like you know, head of the house kind of, helping the family decide where to go, what to plan for the future. So they did decide to come to Thailand to flee Cambodia. And during that time what my mom had left was very little gold, not much valuable stuff. I mean we hired somebody, a group of people that came with us to Thailand, trying to flee Cambodia at night, walk through at night. WE pay, I'm not sure how much they paid. Quite a few, you know, gold for the trip. And they took us to Thailand at night, and we had to prepare, carry, very light stuff that we can carry. And my oldest sister, she had her little daughter, [Khan]. She was a baby, my niece. And then her oldest sister was about probably seven, or six years old. And I had to carry her, [Khan] older sister, during the time. And my brother carry, my older, my brother-in-law carried other stuff, and then kind of guide the family. We went through that to Thailand, but during the trip there were like different group of thief in the jungle trying to take all of your valuables. Somehow they had connection with the person that we hired. So that's how they knew like people came at night, and then they took, they come, like they did like thoroughly checking you. Some people they had to take their clothes off, you know, they check everything. If you have any valuable stuff in your, your bag, or in your body, or anywhere they see, they took all of the valuable stuff.

A: So that happened to you, you folks?

J: Yah, umhm.

A: How far were you from Thailand when that happened?

J: I don't know, but during that point you stop at different place, and then they check us at different place. They didn't check, check randomly, they just said, you know, you had to let them see what you have. They just take whatever they think is valuable to them, gold, jewelry, [unclear]. Then before you're passing through the Thai border, you had to cross big high sidewalk, they call, what do they call? Just a big sidewalk that they pass through another, from Cambodia border to Thai border. If the Thai soldier see you, they would shoot you.

A: Shoot at you?

J: Shoot at you. So we had to be careful to walk through and quiet the baby. Make sure nobody crying during that time. It was very difficult, very hard, you know. Take a lot of patience. It was so terrible during all those ah, escaping. When we came to Thailand we stayed there for a week. And then we didn't know that the Thai soldier send us back to Thailand. They told us to, they bring like big, big truck to pick us up. They said, send them to another camp. Instead of send us to another camp, they drop us off the border of the Thai and Cambodia. They sent us back to Cambodia in another way.

A: They did that?

J: Yah. My family, my family wanted them, that they send us there. That's called Phnom [unclear]. I went through that. Was very, very traumatic experience during that time, because we did not have food to eat. Not enough, not water. The first time we couldn't find the water in the jungle. A lot of people die of starvation, dying of water, no food, no water, and landmine everywhere. One of the experience that I still have that reflection in my eye right now. Having seen people step by the landmine in front of me, like just like three feet, I was like the third person. And then like the first person stepped by and got killed. All the blood was flying. I'm there in front of him. So like you walk, you had to walk behind you other people footstep. You cannot move yourself. If you move you're going to end up step by another landmine and you got killed everywhere. People dying in the jungle. People screaming, crying, the baby crying. Some baby laying without anybody taking care of them, because their parents die, or their parents do not have, didn't have [unclear] and they just let them there, die, kill. So that was very, very sad and horrible experience that I been through. Seeing dead bodies everywhere, drinking dirty water like animal, you know, who pee in there. You've been through all of these horrible situations. No food, we all starving. And I had my youngest brother. He was about less than ten years old. We tried to get everything to feed him. Sometime we had, they, we had some rice, all purpose flour, which with water is just like gluey, but we drink that because we didn't have enough food to eat. We can't make a bread. We can't do anything. We just drink that to survive. And one point during that [war], my older sister was [Khan Mam], then my other two sisters and me all of a sudden we were blind, like in the nighttime we had, we cannot see, just totally black at night, until sunrise very high and then we can see. We open our eye, but just like blurry. And your eye, you can't see anything at all, because of malnutrition. We did not have enough food to eat, no vitamins, no meat, no salt. And I remember [Khan] was a baby. She was crying because her Mom didn't have milk for her drink. And at one point at night sometime my, anybody, one of us want to go to the bathroom, you had to dig the hole. My mom had to help us dig the hole. And they had to like hold our hand, because we couldn't see anything. We opened, our eyes were opened, but it was blind. And I feel so sorry for [Khan's] mother, because she was a baby, and her grandfather had to, and her father had to take care of her. And she was so skinny and tiny baby. So it was really bad experience to look, to remember all of this stuff. Somehow I feel like I survived through all of this and everything. Like if I, that's why I say to pass it on. I can do something to pass it on. I feel like I'm happy.

?: What was your goal at that time like to pass that to get to where, what was your goal?

J: We were, just want to have our sight back. And then my mom heard from some other people, you have to have to get some meat for her to eat. And my, [Khan Mam] had a watch. So she gave my Mom the watch. During that time there were some people that didn't go to Thailand, they stay in Cambodian border, and they, they originally there, and they had some chicken or whatever their farm left, rice and stuff. And, and then they ended up sold, trade gold with dog. And they killed the dog for, to eat. And then my mom used that dog meat to roast it. And it was like, we ate it because we want to survive. And the night, that night we ate and (--)

Side A ends

Side B begins

A: You were, you were telling us that you traded (--)

J: My mom (A: Your mom traded) used the watch to trade meat. That meat was dog meat. Just like a piece of meat and then she roast it for, for four of us to eat. And that night we ate, the next day we were able to see. Our eyesight was back. And we were happy, and my mom was relieved too. She's you know, we were able to get our, whatever we want to do at night, get up, do other things.

A: Now you said you got into Thailand, and then they took you and they brought you back into Cambodia?

J: Yah, that was called Phnom [unclear]. It was the mountain, it was a mountain called Phnom [unclear]. Big mountain. It was jungle. You hear animal like tiger, or different animal that live in the jungle, roaring, roaring at night.

?: What year was that?

J: In 1979.

A: And how did you guys get back into Thailand?

J: We walked through that mountain. We walked from the mountain back to Battambang. It took us three months to walk back.

A: So you went from Battambang to Thailand.

J: We went, yah.

A: And then (--)

J: But during the trip from, those three months it was very difficult, because one of my second oldest sister, she was pregnant. Didn't have enough food. Somehow they had to carry her. Used the stick and then put like [unclear]? (? : Hammock) Hammock to carry her, because her feet were swollen, her whole body was swollen. And when she came to [unclear] the baby was born, and a few days, maybe a week later the baby died. Somehow you know, the baby couldn't survive.

A: So explain it to us just once more. You went to Thailand. (J: Uh huh) How long did that take you?

J: We went to Thailand through, then the Thai soldier drive us to the Cambodian/Thai border. We went through Phnom [unclear]. Took us three months to walk through, to walk back to Cambodia. And then we stay in Cambodia, to Battambang. Probably a month later we came back again. We decided to come back to Thailand again. During that time one of my, my four older sister, she already came to United States. And she posted her picture, letter and the poster in Khao-I-Dang Camp. So they found her. They sponsored her through Khao-I-Dang Camp. Probably, this trip, the trip back to Thailand again, it was easier than the first one.

A: Why was that?

J: Because a lot of people kind of knew the way out, and then the, the border, whatever the group that took us there the first time, it wasn't organized enough. The second time people were you know, able to find the right person. And it was more peaceful than the first time. And I remember the first night, the second time we came to Thailand camp, it wasn't Khao-I-Dang Camp, some camp that I couldn't remember the name. It was raining, raining, raining, pouring that night. Everything was wet. We slept with wet clothes. I couldn't sleep at all. The next day we walked to Khao-I-Dang Camp. I was very sick. Malaria came back to me again. All the cold that, I got a cold during that time. I was really, really sick because of the rain soaking through the clothes that we slept through the night. We had no place to sleep. Not enough food to eat.

A: What would be the next question guys?

?: I think we, we can't go with that?

A: How long did you stay at the camp?

J: How long did I stay in the camp? Probably about six months. Then my sister, her sponsor were able to sponsor us to United States. And my, my vision about United States during that time I thought were like many strange people. I didn't know [unclear]. I didn't know they were, you know. I remember the night that we came to my sponsor house. She let us sleep in her bed, me and my sister. I thought that was a royal family. The bed, and all the furniture, they decorate the house. We were so pleased with what they gave us. They, you know, treat us. They told me you've been through so much and we were sleeping on the ground, and now we came to sleep on the mattress. In my whole

life in Cambodia I never slept in mattress before. We just slept through the wood, the floor. And so my life is like, go up.

?: How did your sister get to the United States first? Did you guys part within your journey, or?

J: No, they, she had her own family. Her husband and her kid. So we all had different, we kind of had their own family. And when we went, when we stay in the camp, [Khan] family is separate from our family. [Khan] and her parent are one family. And my family is another family. My Mom and my other four brother and sister, and me, six of us were kind of one family without father. And then my second oldest sister and her husband was another family. But some point they were able to sponsor my family, my mom, me and then my two younger brother and two younger sister, and my second sister and her husband, and her husband nephew, together to United States first.

?: Did you keep in contact with the sister that came to the U.S. first?

J: Um, we, they knew that we were in camp someplace. So they, she told her sponsor that they had to post her picture everywhere in the camp in order for them to see her. And then my sponsor in the United States do all the paper work from here, because my sister knew, know all the name in my family. So they kind of put the documentation together through government, through different immigration.

?: When did you guys first see the poster, and what was your reaction?

J: Like I said, my brother-in-law was in charge of that, and we were happy to hear that he's in United States, but there, there was no contact, only letter, maybe a couple of letter during that time. She sent us some money. And then later, like I said, not long stay in the camp probably six months, then we were to come to United States.

A: What were your sponsor's names?

J: Her name is Pauline [Rand]. She's, now she's in New York, live in New York, Killington, New York. We still have contact. Once in awhile, especially during a holiday, I call her. She's very old now. We still have contact with one another, sending pictures and stuff. She's, she very nice. She help, they helped us through a lot. So I was very pleased, very grateful with her, and with what she you know, supporting us. That's how I get to know the church, because she was Presbyterian, and she want us to go to Presbyterian Church.

?: What happened to your remaining family that was in Cambodia, I mean Thailand? The one that was at [unclear].

J: Later on my sponsor have another friend, sponsored [Khan's] family, my older sister. He was a teacher during that time in Johnstown, New York. He sponsored my oldest

sister's family. And when we came here he taught us English. And now he's in Kenya helping other poor children.

A: In Canada?

J: In Kenya. In Kenya in Africa.

?: Kenya in Africa.

A: Oh Kenya, wow.

J: His name is [(Yvon) Bouchard]. We still, I still have connection with him, through email, letters. So they are very good people. That's why some of the memory and thing that I don't forget, not to giving back to them, but somehow I want to pass it along to other people. I don't think they want me to give anything to them. They want me to pass it along to other people, what we've been through, what we are grateful for.

A: Now what brought you to Lowell?

J: What brought us to Lowell? Like I said, my oldest sister, when she arrived in Johnstown, New York, she and her husband has a brother-in-law, and their family live in Lowell. They told her that Lowell have a lot of Cambodian. People, everything is very accessible. School is so close to the apartment. Store everywhere. During that time they was no grocery. [Unclear] any Southeast Asian grocery store nearby. But the, the people came from Lowell, originally that were refugee from Cambodia. We want to live with our own people. So we were in Johnstown with just our family.

A: No other Cambodians in Johnstown?

J: No other Cambodians in Johnstown.

A: And did you, how did you guys get your food to eat? Did you eat American food, or?

J: The first time, when we were in Johnstown, we were, my sponsor and my sister's sponsor took us to China, to Chinatown in Albany, New York. They show us all different kind of food. We kind of familiar with the food, and I remember at that time we didn't have a lot of money. What we had was very valuable. And we bought, I didn't go with them, my oldest sister went with my sponsor to buy noodle, the packet noodle like the Cambodian store selling now. It was very special to us. We didn't eat that everyday. We can eat only on weekend. That's it, and what we had was like [unclear] with pack of pork, pork butt, you know. We ate the whole meat for over ten people in the family, and rice, and then we use broccoli and stuff. We learn how to use that. I remember noodle was very, very special for us first time we came to United States.

A: And what did you guys do when you first came to Lowell?

J: When we first came to Lowell my husband was a church member. He was one of the person that help, his sponsor was George and Joyce Adam. Joyce Adam was a pastor at Eliot Presbyterian Church during that time. She really cared for the refugee. Whenever they hear the refugees have arrived in Lowell, they would bring clothes, bring food to us. So we got food pantry from them, and then furniture, or furniture, or clothes for them. And they took us even to shop in the supermarket in Lowell. And then sometime other Cambodian in Lowell kind of walk us around to buy food.

A: What was your first impression of the city?

J: It was more, more like a city than when I was living in Johnstown, New York. It was quiet [unclear]. I remember we didn't have a car in my family, in Johnstown, New York. My old, my second older sister, she was pregnant. She walked to supermarket. We walked, and then we got food like a couple of miles home, walking, looking back there thinking, people probably think we're crazy or something, you know, carrying food. At one point it was freezing cold outside, my youngest brother and my second oldest sister didn't know how cold it was, they were sandals. They went like a couple of blocks and they came home, they were crying because they were freeze. And their nose, they couldn't feel their nose. And they couldn't talk, their face turned red. [Chuckling as she speaks] And they couldn't say anything, they cry because it was so cold. And they didn't know it, how cold it was. We were inside the house and they want to go to market. And they couldn't get to the market it was so cold. And they came home, they, they didn't say anything. It was cold and they couldn't talk. That was some of the memory that, not making fun of them, but trying you know, remember back, wearing sandal outside. We thought that sandal can go anyway, but winter time you can't wear sandal.

?: How old were they at that time?

J: How old were they? Um, my brother was about seventeen years old, but he was small. Then my sister, she's older than me, she was probably about twenty-five and she was pregnant. Went outside with you know, light coat, and came home and they're crying. Couldn't say anything, everything was freeze. And her face was ice cold.

?: Exactly how many members of your family came here?

J: Exactly? During that time, like I said, my Mom and then I had my younger, two younger sister and younger brother, and me. We were single. And my oldest, my older sister, my older sister is [Khan] family with four of her family, and that was nine. And then my second oldest sister, she and her husband and her nephew would be um, two, four, seven, twelve, it would be twelve, and my other sister and her husband and the baby.

?: Fifteen?

J: Fifteen of us, but we lived in separate apartments next to each other.

?: And where did you live when you first came to Lowell?

J: We were living at Mill Street, Richmond Street, where the [few words unclear]. Very more community oriented, because all the Cambodian live in the same building. The landlord [was so] good to us, you know.

A: Why?

J: Um, because we didn't speak good English, we didn't know anything and just lived there, a lot of cockroaches and they needed to pay the rent on time, they didn't fix the apartment. Not enough heat. It was just so crowded. And the building wasn't very sturdy.

A: What year did you come to Lowell?

J: In 1981. And right away during that time, when I came in September, I start to go to school for, the Adult Education School. It was in the building where John Parking Garage across the street there, they teach ESL to adult.

A: Oh, next to Lowell Five Cents Saving?

J: No. Across (--) Yah, yah, right. Umhm, yah. That building now is the high school. I went there. I walked from Mill Street there, I didn't think it was far, but [unclear] myself on Mill Street, because I want to go in the evening and in the daytime. I learn my English over there. And about not even a year I broke my leg. My left knee, I twist myself and I couldn't go to school for a month. Then I got married with my husband. And after I got married I went to live with my sponsor, my husband's sponsor in North Billerica, for like about a year. When I had my first daughter we moved back to Lowell. We lived in Lowell with my Mom on Mill Street again. And then later on we saved some money, probably a couple of thousand dollars. We bought our house, first house, five-family house on Branch Street, 15 Branch Street. So we rent it to the family member and other friends.

A: How did you meet your husband?

J: How I met him? At Church. At Eliot Church. So then we got married there.

?: Oh, how long did you know him before you got married?

J: Um, we didn't really go out and date, anything. He kind of liked me. I didn't really quite like him during that time, but some point, you know, I had my pastor, he was single, he likes me too. But I didn't know he likes me either. Somehow I chose my husband, because he came from the same country. During that time he, he had his wife in Cambodia, and he already had children. And my mom, and my brother and sister didn't really want me to get married with my husband. Somehow I kind of open the way for my younger brother and sister. I decided you know, not to follow my parent's rule. And

they was very upset. They were yelling at me, said all kinds of stuff that they didn't think I respect them. But I felt very guilty, because I thought I didn't respect them during that time. It's not like (--). Now I, I, when I'm looking back, it's not me respect, it's not about respecting. They, they didn't understand how I feel, and I didn't share with them, this is what I want. So they, when we brought up as children, you respect them, you don't talk back to them. What they arrange for you, you're suppose to follow them. That was respecting to them. That's the way our culture. But now I'm happy what I decide, I made my decision, because to look back it's not about respect. It's not about like, follow them all the time. When you respect you understand, but you also accept the difference. So that's another thing that I'm passing to my children, and kind of open it to them. Whoever they are dating, or they want to be with, it's not about me, about their, their life. So whether good or bad, it's their, they make their choice, but I'm there to support them. So I'm happy with my husband and four happy daughter.

?: You have four daughters?

J: Yah, four daughters.

?: How old are they?

J: My oldest daughter, she's twenty. She's in her, next year, yah, this coming semester she's going to be a junior in Boston College. And my second daughter, she's going to Simmons.

?: Yah, I met her at orientation.

J: And then my third daughter, she's eighteen years old. My third daughter, she's seventeen, she's in her senior high school next year. And then I have my little girl, she's nine years old. They're all doing good in school. I'm very happy for them. Proud of them.

?: How long did you live in North Billerica before you moved to Pelham?

J: We lived there, as soon as my oldest daughter Elizabeth was born we moved back to lived with my mother in the Mill Street apartment. Because during that time my husband and I work on second shift. No one babysitting for her, so we stayed with my Mom. And I remember the first time I had my daughter. Now my younger sister came to visit us. She didn't, she just had her baby like a year ago. One and a half year now the little baby. It's so hard to be a first parent. And I remember one time I, I tried to give Tylenol to my oldest daughter, I didn't know how to feed her. I didn't know how to give it to her. I put directly to her mouth and then she choked. I was crying. I was shaky. I didn't know what to do. I called for my mother to help me. And when my young sister came here she didn't know how to, she knew it but she cannot help herself to feed baby medicine by herself. She sit at home, three people had to, one person hold the baby head, one person hold the baby leg, to give her medicine. I told her this is, you know, when you hold a baby you put one of the baby arm under your arm and then I hold by myself to feed, to

give medicine to the baby to show her this is the way. So I remember I told her the story that I was a young mom, I didn't know anything. I remember that, she was, my oldest daughter was breast feeding. They, they had a demonstration for you, demo in hospital, but I didn't quite understand. My English wasn't that good. So when I came home what I picked up was like feeding your baby every three hour. So at night my daughter was sleeping I still feed her. I didn't know that she should sleep through the night. And one day I tried to feed her, she was sleeping and I kept putting her mouth on my breast, and she didn't want to drink milk. And I was so worried all night long when she, she didn't wake up until like ten in the morning. I called the nurse, I said, "Something's wrong with my baby. She didn't drink milk all night long." And the nurse told me, "Look at her skin. How was her skin, she said, was her skin pale?" I said, "No." It looked pink, normal. And I was worried. I thought, you know, something is wrong that she didn't, she didn't want to drink my milk. I didn't know that she had to sleep through the night, because she probably sick of me waking, wake her up at night to drink milk, to feed her. And I didn't know that. Until now I realize, I told my sister, I told that story, tell that story to my children. They was laughing at me. That's how terrible I was being a first mom.

A: Where did you work on second shift?

J: At BASF. It was, I worked as an assembly line, putting the videotape together.

A: In Bedford?

J: In Bedford, yes, Bedford, Mass. I worked there about four years. Then I, I had my daughter Emily, my second daughter. My husband [unclear] too much, and I stayed home. When I stayed home I still, I went to school during my pregnancy, off and on, off and on. I tried to get my GED. And I didn't get either. I didn't get my GED because my daughter was born. After my Emily was born, four months later I got pregnant again with my third daughter. So he told me to stay home for a while. And I stayed home, my mom baby sitting the kids, and I went to school in the morning. I couldn't finish school either. I took some classes at the Vocational School, learning to be a bookkeeper, or yah. And I didn't finish that. And then I worked at some point [unclear] in the bank as a filer, worked in the filing department trying to learn banking and stuff. I worked there about six months. My husband say he want to open a restaurant. He had a partner who wanted to work with us together then. I didn't quite know how to cook at that time. And my mom and my older sister said, "Go for it. You are going to learn, have experience being a cook." And I took that, you know. I decided that, "Okay, I'm going to learn how to cook." And when I went in the restaurant, I remember the first time I was scared of the fire. The wok had a lot of flame coming out. I don't like the flame. But somehow I forced myself through a lot of difficult time. Sometime customer came to complain about the food. I didn't, I felt very bad and I also didn't get upset with them. I took a lesson learning from the customer. They give you, you know, they give you feedback. The food should cook this. The shrimp, I didn't know how to peel the shrimp. I remember, shrimp you should cut the middle part to take all the guts out. I didn't do that

for the customer. They gave us feedback, but they didn't get upset with us. So I learned that through my experience working as a cook.

A: Where was the restaurant at?

J: The restaurant was on Market Street, right near, one of the building behind the Lowell, the Education High School right now, the little building over there. It was my husband, then his partner and I work together, just three of us working long hours, being cook, didn't do anything. It was so stressful. I thought, at some point I thought I was in jail. Only I did was cooking and you know, preparing food. I didn't, because all my life coming to United States, all I want is to go back to school to earn, to get more, higher education. I didn't finish school in Cambodia. I always wanted to learn more, get more schooling for myself. I want to stand up for myself. No matter what other people say, I'm more like, I don't want to be a housewife. I want to be myself, do like other people do. My husband respect my idea, but at the same time, when I was in the restaurant I didn't fulfill my dreams. That's why we sold that restaurant. Then I went back to school again. And then he owned another restaurant, partnering with another person. The [Thailand] Plaza [unclear] called it Red Rose Restaurant. I wasn't really happy with the plan, but somehow I just went to help. And during that time I took part-time at Casey Family Service as a contractor during the daytime, while I put my daughter through day school. So then three years later I get my GED from Lowell, at the Education Program. I was so happy. I was able to, to make a speech for the school. So I was very happy. In my whole life all I dream for is my GED and making the speech was my first impression. And I never felt so happy during that time. The smile, the joyful came out through my heart. You don't have to smile, it just came out. I was, I felt like you know, I had a million dollar. That's something I wanted. My wish came through. I was so happy, so excited I made that speech. And they were so happy about what I did. And I was just so pleased at my life, something that I accomplished. It was a very big achievement for myself. And I continue to go to Middlesex Community College since then, taking some classes, even though I'm not very good, but I don't want to give up no matter whatsoever. I'm getting old, but I feel like, you know, the more I learn, the more I understand, the more I educate myself, and educate my children. And my children see that through what I've been through. I'm very pleased with myself, and with my decision.

?: So is Red Rose Restaurant still part of your husband's?

J: No, we sold that. We sold that, then he had another business. He liked to do business. Then he partnering with another person that did the Sea [Urchin] a couple of years. And now he does another agency called Demolition. It's called asbestos.

A: With the asbestos?

J: Yah, asbestos. But we like, you know, [unclear].

A: What was the name of the little restaurant down here on Market Street?

J: It's called [Kol Kong] Restaurant. (A: Okay) One of the oldest restaurants in Lowell.

A: Do you have pictures of that restaurant?

J: Um, I have at home, but I didn't, I don't think I can find it. Somehow my husband, during that time, had his picture in the newspaper. It was [unclear] restaurant, but sometime like we, we able to make profit through that. It was funny, but somehow I had learned, I had so much experience through that restaurant.

A: Well any final thoughts about your time coming to Lowell, working here?

J: All I (-- I, I have been, my family have been very blessed to be able to come to the United States, to go to Eliot Church, to get a lot of love, support through my church, through the communities, especially, yah, and my work place, my coworkers, my team leader, my director, are very supportive for me. Me, and to my family, and we are very you know, [unclear]. So I'm very happy with what I'm doing now. Very happy what we been through, all of these situation. Like I said, we are very blessed through what we, all the fulfill that we had in our family. We got a house, we have my family together, my children growing up, going to good school. They're doing good in school. And I got a good job, even though I don't got a good, lot of pay, somehow I don't have a degree, but they accept who I am through my experience working with the community. And somehow I'm happy, because I see myself as an older person with the community, they respect me. And especially being a bilingual person, you are proud of yourself, even though you have accent. And people kind of respect who you are. And after that if you're able to speak, able to read and write, they're two different languages, so that is a plus for me. And I thank you for interviewing me.

?: Thank you.

J: Any other thought or concern, I really you know, hope you will come back and ask me. I don't mind. I just want to share what I have, what I've been through. To let other people know that we all, we all live through difficult life, and somehow you have to, you have to feel that in order to get through. Just like you walk through the step, you cannot jump. You have to walk step by step. You cannot solve the problem to run away through problem. You got to solve. You cannot run away from problem, you have to solve. If you run away you're never able to feel that situation. So don't walk away. Whether happy, or sad, you need to solve that in order for you to be succeed in your life.

?: Thank you.

A: Thanks very much.

J: Umhm.

End of Interview

